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Principal Examiner Feedback

Summer 2012

GCE Music Technology 6MT04
Analysing and Producing

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Summer 2012
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General Introduction

Centres were well prepared for the examination. The vast majority of scripts arrived with complete CDs and this was an improvement upon last year. However, some CDs did not play, suggesting that centres did not test them before posting. Some were damaged in the post; centres are reminded of the importance of wrapping them carefully, and also to avoid attaching sticky labels, which can damage CDs and CD drives. The most common mistake was burning a data CD instead of an audio CD. Some exam papers were posted much later than the exam date. The scripts should be posted on the day of the exam. Sometimes, exams officers in schools don't put the CDs in with the papers.

There was a clear distinction between centres that had prepared well using past papers and thoroughly researched music technology theory, and those that seemingly had invested little time on theory and mock examinations. Candidates from the latter centres would not be able to access the higher grades due to insufficient detail in responses.

Some students did not solo the tracks for tasks 1 and 2 so they could not access all of the marks. Strange mixes that could not score many marks included just the vocals soloed for all three tasks and a two bar task 3. It is vital that the candidates set the bounce bars correctly and unmute all of the tracks otherwise there is little work for the examiner to assess. However, there were fewer of such submissions this year.

All questions reflected a full range of responses, from 0 to full marks and everything in between, reflecting a well-judged assessment. It was common to see papers that scored high in the 60s, and also at the other extreme, fewer than 10 marks. It is thought that the paper was very fair, revealing clearly the candidate's ability level. This is reflected in feedback received from both teachers and examiners.

Question 1

(a) This question was answered quite poorly. A common mistake was to identify the major equivalent key of E. Candidates should have looked at the last note which was the root, C#. "C#" alone was not worth a mark; 'minor' had to be noted.

(b) This question was generally well answered. Most candidates were able to notate the correct pitches accurately. Some candidates circled more than one note in the bar so failed to gain credit.

(c) This question was answered well by most. Most candidates were able to notate rhythms accurately but some lost marks by not correcting the whole bar, proving that they could add up the beats in 4/4, or by putting notating shorter note values with additional rests. Candidates must circle the whole bar to gain credit, following the instructions in bold in the question.

(d) Generally this was answered well; some answered with 1/16 but a significant minority opted for 1/12.

(e) Most candidates did not achieve full marks as they mentioned more than one method (e.g. swing and humanise) but did not explain how these work. A high number of answers mostly re-worded the question e.g. “Swing quantise to give a more human and natural feel”. Some candidates veered off what the question was asking for and discussed merits of velocity shaping or the benefits of shaping note lengths. Most answers suggested that the candidates did not fully understand how these processes work.

(f) This question was designed to see if candidates could apply familiar processing to correct an unfamiliar error. Candidates tackled the question in different ways. Good responses made use of automating a plug-in to correct the pitches. For many candidates, an incorrect dry/wet mix caused modulation or beating. Others misjudged the edit points, causing clicks. Some candidates corrected the pitch in one bar only, usually bar 30, and others adjusted the pitch of bar 32 in addition. Very few candidates adjusted the pitch by the wrong interval. Approximately 1 in 10 made no attempt to edit pitch at all. Some candidates had replaced the audio with a sequence at the correct pitch so there was a timbral difference; others copy and pasted the previous two bars so some of the pitches still didn’t match the score.

Question 2

The written parts to this question were aimed at differentiating the high grade candidates; the practical parts were aimed at differentiating low grade candidates. As a result, there were many scripts where written parts to this question were blank.

(a) Commonly, candidates provided several answers. Candidates cannot score by writing a list of guesses if one is incorrect. “Feedback” was a common incorrect answer.

(b) The majority of candidates identified humbuckers and that they have two coils. There were many answers that were too vague and the detail of the opposite polarity/phase was often missing.

(c) The most common response by far was that the noise was cut out but not tight enough, leaving a snippet of hum remaining at 0:10 and again at the end, yielding 3 out of 4. A few rare candidates were able to successfully eliminate all of the noise. A few candidates attempted to use a gate to remove the noise, but this normally cut out snippets of the guitar also.

(d) This was tackled well by the majority of candidates. A few left a slight click remaining (usually L channel) at the joins, and there were other occasional problems such as audible cross-fades.

(e) This was answered well by most candidates. The most common error was the track going out of time either because of careless location of edit points or the looping of sections that were not trimmed accurately enough.

(f) Most candidates identified the wah wah pedal correctly. Many identified a filter, but fewer were able to accurately describe the characteristics of the filter.

(g) In 2010, when set as a practical task, this question was poorly answered. Candidates seem to have improved knowledge now. Lower level candidates could score 2 with a description of copying the track combined with opposite panning. The most common error was not describing *automatic* double tracking; instead responding with a description of overdubbing a second performed track, or a stereo capture of a single performance.

Question 3

In general, most candidates scored highly on this question. This question was designed to differentiate across the low to middle ability candidates. Consequently, blank answers were rare.

Nearly all candidates were able to respond to the 'What would you choose' box with a valid response. The candidates who were unsuccessful in the 'Reason for choice' box did not use technical vocabulary. Vague answers like 'only the vocal is picked up' or 'the condenser microphone would pick up a better sound' were not worthy of credit.

Question 4

There are two options for question 4, designed to give all candidates with diverse music technology interests, a chance to illustrate their expertise for the subject. This question differentiated well across the cohort. There was a full range of responses ranging from 0 marks where no relevant information had been written, to some excellent responses scoring maximum marks. The exhaustive mark scheme gave credit for all relevant knowledge and covered the range of candidate responses. Lengthy, meandering answers with little or repetitive content failed to secure high marks. Many answers merely rephrased the question, giving no further information, so no credit could be given. Candidates should be encouraged to write concisely and informatively. A student that had just memorised information without understanding it is unlikely to score top marks in this question because it is designed to test higher levels of understanding. To obtain top marks in question 4, an informative use of technical vocabulary applied to an unfamiliar situation is expected. Candidates must spell technical terms correctly to gain credit in this question.

About two thirds of candidates answered 4(a).

(a) Some very low scoring candidates merely listed their favourite guitar bands with little reference to different types or methods of producing distortion. Some better candidates often referenced the same artists and methods suggesting some commonality in the use of study material. The most successful candidates were those that explored the changing methods of applying distortion and linked this to artists and musical styles. Often these same candidates were the ones that started by giving a clear description of what distortion is. Weaker candidates that failed to gain marks for successfully stating what distortion is suggests some students had not considered what this effect was doing to a signal. A small number of students were able to compare the qualities of different types of distortion including valve and transistor and consequently scored high marks. Candidates that described how the key controls of distortion units affected the waveform scored high marks.

(b) The introduction of a photograph for this question provided opportunity for candidates to apply their knowledge to an unfamiliar situation by taking cues from the picture. A candidate that correctly linked their practical experience of a delay plug-in to the controls seen in the photograph could score very high marks. The weakest candidates would simply expand the name of a control into a sentence, for example “Echo Volume is how loud the echo is”. No credit is given for candidates rewording the question. However some weaker candidates were able to pick up many more marks by having the stimulus there as they were more likely to write about more settings, leading to more description. Many didn't refer to the picture sufficiently, or even open a delay plug-in, in an attempt to make a direct comparison as the question implies. Repeat rate was often confused with feedback/intensity, or intensity was often not described or linked to feedback; candidates that correctly made these links already had scored 6 marks. When listing the advantages of a software plug-in, many students fell into simply listing rather irrelevant, non-technical issues such as portability, cost, size etc which didn't attract any marks. A number of students failed to realise that hardware devices such as the Space Echo can be used after the recording process, during mixing via aux busses.

Question 5

This question had a good range of editing, processing and effects-based tasks to cater for a wide range of student ability and knowledge. Many candidates scored full marks in Question 5.

Candidates should answer the questions and not add other creative panning, dynamic processing, EQ and effects not specified in the question.

(a) Generally most candidates did well in this question creating a convincing telephone-like EQ effect and scoring 3 marks. The most common mistake seemed to come from candidates not checking the level of the phrase in relation to the phrases before and after, resulting in it being noticeably louder or quieter thus scoring 2 marks. Few candidates failed to create a convincing telephone EQ and fewer still failed to attempt the task. Some candidates mistakenly left the EQ on for the whole track.

(b) The vocal track was intentionally recorded with an extreme dynamic range which required heavy compression to even it out. Merely using a preset would not have fully answered the question. Able candidates increased the ratio and brought the threshold low enough to ensure that the quiet parts were treated, thus scoring 3 marks. Some candidates answered the question with clumsy volume automation which couldn't receive full credit.

(c) Panning was usually executed in a professional way. A few candidates were careless and applied panning that did not follow the instructions. Sometimes opposite panning was applied, highlighting the fact that candidates are not checking their headphones are worn the right way around.

(d) Most candidates did add reverb and most had the right idea about the type. A small minority ignored the instructions about reverb time and did what they wanted, resulting in cavernous examples and a few with bathroom like qualities. The candidates that scored 2 were generally a touch heavy-handed with the reverb and had often achieved this by adding large quantities to the guitar track. Some candidates incorrectly added delay to the vocal. There were also misjudged instances where the panning for 5(c) had been added using separate tracks and the reverb not applied to these.

(e) The guitar was intentionally mastered at a higher level than the other tracks to differentiate the students that actually noticed that it needed turning down significantly. The most common mistake was leaving the guitar too loud, therefore drowning out the vocals.

(f) Many candidates chopped off reverb tails. This was careless editing, particularly where candidates had achieved full marks elsewhere.

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